

I know everyone is used to seeing an article written here regarding Medicare during or prior to the Medicare "season" each year, but I think any time of year is the right time to share information in an effort to explain the unexplainable. The following information is historical in that it is from an article titled "Senate Avoids Action on Negotiated Drug Prices" dated June '07 and printed in a retirees' union paper.

The 2003 Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) which created the Part D prescription drug program, included a ban on Medicare's ability to negotiate drug prices on behalf of its 43 million beneficiaries. During the 2006 election campaign, Democrats said that if they won a congressional majority, they would push to overturn the ban. Estimates show that seniors could save \$30 billion a year if Medicare used its buying power to bargain with drug companies.

In January, the new U.S. House of Representatives leadership won passage of a bill that would REQUIRE the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to negotiate prices with drug companies on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries. The Senate took up a similar bill in mid-April- not as strong as the House version but considered the best chance for a majority vote. The Senate bill lifts the MMA's ban, but stops short of requiring HHS to negotiate.

Unfortunately, opponents of the bill blocked it from coming to the Senate floor. On a measure to limit debate, which requires the votes of 60 senators, only 6 Republicans joined the 49 Democrats who voted to move the bill. Republican leaders said they were satisfied with the current drug prices in private Part D insurance plans and saw no need for Medicare to step in. As a result, no further action will be taken on the bill at this time.

It's a shame. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) negotiates on behalf of all veterans and pays rock bottom prices for drugs. For the top 20 drugs most prescribed for seniors, the lowest prices offered by Part D drug plans are 48.2 percent higher than the lowest prices offered by the VA.

Information is vital in this world of having to watch over your shoulder as well as having to question and even investigate the guy who is staring you in the eye while smiling and lying through his teeth. Don't we all dream of a government (on all levels) that would at least try to do what is best for the folks they are supposed to represent - meaning us, not corporate America? Well, since it doesn't look like that will happen if we leave them alone, how about standing up and screaming until we are heard. As we know now, the information cited above was only the beginning of the travesty. Medicare is going full steam ahead, but in the wrong direction..

Rules and prices are changed at will to favor the insurance companies, so to say they could not be changed in our favor is ludicrous. I would much rather contemplate what my government could do FOR me than to have to face what my government is willing to do TO me.

NOTE: Don't forget there may be help with your prescriptions:

1) You may qualify for prescription help from a subsidy from Medicare 2) Wal-Mart, Target and others have their \$4.00 prescription deals 3) Cosco apparently has good prices and you don't have to be a member to use their pharmacy 4) The PP A (Prescription Partnership Association) program as advertised by Montel Williams in which the manufacturers of your drugs may give them to you for much less or free (1-888-477-2669) More "good news" next month.

Good luck to everyone and keep healthy! !

